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Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SIL-01

LAB-04 EB-07 /081 W
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FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6936
INFO AMEMBASS BONN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASS PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
EC BRUSSELS 274
USMISSION NATO
DIA
USDOCOSOUTH

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, MT
SUBJ: MALTESE ELECTION CAMPAIGN BEGINS WITH VIOLENCE

REF: VALLETTA 0957

1. THE FIRST WEEKEND OF THE OFFICIAL MALTESE ELECTION CAMPAIGN PRODUCED A NUMBER OF ATTACKS BY LABOR PARTY AGITATORS AGAINST NATIONALIT PARTY MEETINGS AND CLUBHOUSES. ALTHOUGH SUCH INCIDENTS HAVE OCCURRED IN THE PAST, AND WERE NOT UNEXPECTED ON THIS OCCASION, THEY ONCE AGAIN SERVED TO UNDERLINE THE BITTERNESS THAT EXISTS BETWEEN THE MORE EXTREME SUPPORTERS OF PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF AND THE ACTIVISTS OF THE NATIONALIST CAUSE. THERE WERE ONLY LIMITED REPORTS OF PERSONAL INJURY, BUT THE PHYSICAL DESTRUCTION AT SEVERAL NATIONALIST CLUBS WAS EXTENSIVE.
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3. THE CATALYST FOR THE VIOLENCE THIS TIME WAS THE LAST, SYMBOLIC SITTING OF THE MALTESE PARLIAMENT, WHICH PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF INSISTED ON HOLDING THE EVENING OF FRIDAY, AUGUST 13. (COMMENT: THIS SUPPOSEDLY UNLUCKY DAY SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN ADOPTED AS A TRADEMARK BY MINTOFF. HE EARLIER FORCED MALTA'S "REPUBLICAN" CONSITUTION THROUGH PARLIAMENT ON FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1974. END COMMENT.) THIS OCCASION WAS THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF MALTA'S NEW, ULTRAMODERN PARLIAMENTARY CHAMBER, A "GIFT" WHICH MINTOFF HAD EXTRACTED FROM HIS FELLOW SOCIALIST, PRIME MINISTER PALME OF SWEDEN. THE NEW CHAMBER WAS NOT COMPLETED (THERE WAS NO AIR CONDITIONING, FOR INSTANCE, WHICH MADE IT HIGHLY UNCOMFORTABLE FOR THE PARTICIPANTS), AND THE NATIONALIST OPPOSITION HAD SUGGESTED IT WOULD BE MORE APPROPRIATE TO HOLD THE CEREMONY AT THE OPENING SESSION OF THE NEW PARLIAMENT AFTER THE ELECTIONS. HOWEVER, MINTOFF REFUSED TO BE DENIED THE CHANCE TO GET ONE-UP ON THE NATIONALISTS THROUGH LIVE TELEVISION COVERAGE OF THE CEREMONY. THE NATIONALISTS OFFICIALLY DECIDED TO BOYCOTT THE AFFAIR, WHICH (IN RETROSPECT) WAS DOUBTLESS A WISE DECISION. ONLY THE LABOR MP'S AND THEIR WIVES, THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS, AND A STRANGERS' GALLERY FILLED WITH STAUNCH LABOR PARTISANS AND THE PRESS ATTENDED.

3. IN ORDER TO EXPRESS SUPPORT FOR WHAT THEY CALLED "FIVE YEARS OF SERVICE TO SOCIALISM AND THE MALTESE PEOPLE" BY THE OUTGOING PARLIAMENT, THE LABOR PARTY ORGANIZATION SUMMONED THEIR MILITANT BRIGADES FROM ALL OVER MALTA FOR A MASS RALLY IN VALLETTA IN THE SQUARE OUTSIDE WHILE THE PARLIAMENTARY SESSION WAS TAKING PLACE. BASED ON PAST EXPERIENCE, IT WAS ASSUMED BY EVERYONE (INCLUDING THE POLICE) THAT THE LABOR RALLY WOULD SOONER OR LATER TURN INTO A MOB AND VENT ITS SPLEEN AGAINST AVAILABLE NATIONALIST TARGETS. THE POLICE DID BARRICADE THE NEAREST NATIONALIST CLUBHOUSES (IN VALLETTA AND FLORIANA), BUT, AS USUAL, THE POLICE TURNED OUT TO BE SINGULARLY INEFFECTIVE IN THE CRUNCH.

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4. BY THE TIME FRIDAY NIGHT WAS OVER, THE NATIONALIST CLUBS IN FOUR DIFFERENT TOWNS HAD BEEN COMPLETELY RANSACKED AND ALL OF THEIR FURNITURE AND EQUIPMENT DESTROYED AND THROWN INTO THE STREETS (VALLETTA, FLORIANA, HAMRUN, ST. VENERAL. IN ADDITION, THE LABOR ROUGHNECKS MADE A STRONG, BUT UNSUCCESSFUL EFFORT TO DEMOLISH THE NATIONALIST PARTY PRINTING PRESS IN HAMRUN, BUT IN THIS CASE THEY WERE NOT ABLE TO GET INSIDE THE

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BUILDING BEFORE THE POLICE ARRIVED TO DISPERSE THEM.

5. ON THE PREVIOUS THURSDAY NIGHT, AND AGAIN ON SATURDAY NIGHT, SMALL NATIONALIST MEETINGS IN DIFFERENT LOCALITIES WERE DISRUPTED BY LABOR TOUGHS, AND THE OPPOSITION PARTY SPEAKERS WERE BESIEGED IN NEARBY PRIVATE HOMES UNTIL THE POLICE FINALLY CTERVENED.

6. THE ONLY PUBLICLY-REPORTED CASUALTY THUS FAR HAS BEEN POLICE CHIEF ENOCH TONNA (AN INEFFECTUAL MINTOFF APPOINTEE), WHO WAS HIT IN THE HEAD WITH A STONE WHILE TRYING TO DISPERSE THE MOB ATTACKING THE NATIONALIST CLUB IN VALLETTA ON FRIDAY NIGHT.

7. ON SATURDAY AND SUNDAY, THE ISLAND WAS QUIET AND PEACEFUL, WITH MOST MALTESE AT THE BEACHES, AND THIS HAS CONTINUED TO BE THE CASE AS THE WORK-WEEK HAS PROGRESSED. IT PROBABLY WILL REMAIN THIS WAY UNTIL ANOTHER MASS DEMONOSTRATION IS CALLED BY ONE PARTY OR THE OTHER. THE NEXT FOUR WEEKENDS (BEFORE THE ELECTION ON SEPTEMBER 17-18) WILL BE THE MOST LIKELY TIMES FOR ANY REPETITION OF THE MORE VIOLENT FEATURES OF THE MALTESE CAMPAIGN SYSTEM. ALTHOUGH LEADERS OF BOTH PARTIES, INCLUDING MINTOFF HIMSELF, HAVE ONCE MORE DECRIED THE VIOLENCE "OF A FEW", AND CALLED FOR A CALM, ORDERLY CAMPAIGN, THEIR RATHER WEAK EFFORTS ARE NOT LIKELY TO HAVE MUCH EFFECT ON THE ROWDY ELEMENTS AMONG THEIR SUPPORTERS. AND, AS HAS BEEN THE CASE OVER MANY YEARS UNDER MINTOFF'S ADMINISTRATION, THE POLICE WILL PROVE TO BE VERY SLOW AND INEFFECTUAL IN CONTROLLING ANY OUTBREAKS.

7. COMMENT: NATIONALIST PARTY LEADERS HAVE INFORMED
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THE EMBASSY PRIVATELY THAT THEY WILL NOT BE INTIMIDATED BY SUCH OBVIOUS LABOR BULLYING TACTICS, AND THAT THEY WILL DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO KEEP THEIR OWN NATIONALIST TOUGHS FROM RETALIATING, AND THUS PROVOKING THE LABORITES EVEN FURTHER. THE NATIONALISTS NOW SEE THE "LAW AND ORDER" ISSUE (OR, AS THEY PUT IT, "DEMOCRACY VS. MOB RULE") AS A MAJOR ONE IN THE FORTHCOMING CAMPAIGN. THEY BELIEVE THAT RAMPAGES OF THE TYPE WITNESSED THIS PAST WEEKEND MAY WELL CONVINCE THE FLOATING AND UNDECIDED VOTERS THAT MALTA'S FUTURE MUST BE ENTRUSTED TO THE NATIONALISTS IF THE COUNTRY'S DOMESTIC FREEDOM IS TO BE PRESERVED. IN THE MEANTIME, THE NATIONALISTS WILL TRY TO TOUGH IT OUT AND HOPE THAT EVEN THE LABOR LEADERS WILL RECOGNIZE THE DESIRABILITY OF TONING DOWN THE STREET FIGHTS. ALMOST ALL MALTESE,

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OF WHATEVER PERSUASION, ARE GLAD THAT THEIR LONG-RUNNING POLITICAL CAMPAIGN WILL, AT LAST, SOON BE OVER. THE OFFICIAL MANIFESTOES OF THE TWO PARTIES ARE EXPECTED TO BE RELEASED PUBLICLY IN A FEW DAYS, IN TIME FOR THE FORTHCOMING WEEKEND POLITICAL MEETINGS. HOPEFULLY, THIS WILL RESULT IN A MORE INTELLECTUAL, AND LESS PHYSICAL, CONFRONTATION DURING THE NEXT ROUND. END COMMENT. WIGGINS

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